



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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07 November 2005

**BLR100651.E**

Belarus: Treatment of Roma, state protection, and state programs (January 2003 - November 2005)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Besides details contained in *Country Reports 2004* (28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 5), information on the treatment of Roma in Belarus was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

### General Information

Roma have lived in Belarus for centuries (BelTA 25 July 2005; Belarus 20 Feb. 2004, 5), are concentrated in the region of Gomel (Interfax 12 July 2004), and have other communities in Minsk and Vitebsk (OSCE 9 Dec. 2004, 16). Citing the head of the Belarusian Romani Community, Interfax stated that Roma of Belarus gave up their nomadic lifestyle in the 1950s and have since moved into towns (Interfax 12 July 2004).

There were conflicting estimates of the size of the Romani community of Belarus (BelTA 25 July 2005; Belarus 20 Feb. 2004, 5; *Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 5; Interfax 12 July). While some estimates, relying on figures from Belarus' 1999 Census, ranged between 6,000 (BelTA 25 July 2005) and 10,000 (Belarus 20 Feb. 2004, 5), other sources mentioned a population of 58,000 (Interfax 12 July 2004) or 70,000 (*Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 5).

According to information provided to the United Nations by the Government of Belarus, on 1 January 2003, there were three legally registered public associations (and their federations) in Belarus (Belarus 20 Feb. 2004, 27). According to information published as recently as 12 July 2004, the head of the Belarusian Romani community is Oleg Kozlovsky (AFP 21 Oct. 2003; BelTA 21 Feb. 2003; Interfax 12 July 2004). Until at least 11 April 2005, Kozlovsky was also chief of the Baltic and CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) Romani Community (Interfax 11 Apr. 2005; BelTA 21 Feb. 2003). Sources have noted efforts made by Kozlovsky to fight nationalism (AFP 21 Oct. 2003) and to push for greater recognition of Belarusian Roma who perished in the Holocaust (Interfax 11 Apr. 2005).

### Treatment

In an 8 April 2005 press release, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) stated that since 2002, it had cooperated with European partners, including several Romani non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to provide basic aid (including "food, firewood, coal and hygiene articles") to 64,000 Roma who had survived the Holocaust, some of whom were in Belarus.

Both Agence France-Presse (AFP) and the BelaPAN News Agency reported that in a September 2005 resolution, the European Parliament condemned the Government of Belarus for the "marginalization" of the Romani community (AFP 29 Sept. 2005; BelaPAN 26 Oct. 2005).

A report submitted by Belarus to the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) mentioned a case of discrimination against Roma, in which, on an unknown date, the head of administration of the rural economy and food production in Svisloch district, Grodno region issued an order that stipulated that "Roma could be employed by the heads of agricultural enterprises only with the consent of the Svisloch district department of internal affairs" (Belarus 20 Feb. 2004, 21-22). This order was later rescinded after an appeal was lodged by the Procurator's Office of the Svisloch district (*ibid.*, 22).

In August 2005, Aleksandr Lepyokhin, head of the Minsk city police department's anti-drugs unit, was reported to have publicly stated that Roma "are [the] main drug traffickers in Minsk" (BelaPAN 5 Aug. 2005).

### Protection

In its June 2005 report entitled *Combating Hate Crimes in the OSCE Region: An Overview of Statistics, Legislation and National Initiatives*, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) outlines provisions in Belarus' Criminal Code that deal with hate crimes. One example of these provisions is Section 130 of the Criminal Code, which punishes "[i]ncitement to hatred or discord on racial, national or religious grounds" with up to five years' imprisonment, depending on the nature of the incitement (OSCE June 2005, 102-103).

On 8 August 2005, the Belarusian news and information agency, BelaPAN, announced the creation of an interethnic and interdenominational group called Soglasie (Concord), which included Roma, the mandate of which was "to protect the rights of ethnic and religious minorities" by stressing interethnic dialog and by presenting a petition to the government (8 Aug. 2005b). The leader of the Soglasie group noted that "[t]he government has monopolized interethnic dialog and has been hushing up many problems existing in the sphere of interethnic relations" (BelaPAN 8 Aug. 2005b). Two days prior to the meeting, BelaPAN alleged, Nikolai Kalinin, a leader of the Belarusian Romani community, was detained and promptly released following a conference on minority rights in Minsk, in connection with a theft in a Minsk neighbourhood (BelaPAN 8 Aug. 2005a). Following his release, Kalinin, who was filmed and fingerprinted during his detention, said he believed the arrest was "an attempt to put pressure on independent leaders and activists of ethnic minorities' associations" (ibid.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). June 2005. Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. "Belarus." *Combating Hate Crimes in the OSCE Region: An Overview of Statistics, Legislation and National Initiatives*. <[http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2005/06/14915\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2005/06/14915_en.pdf)> [Accessed 1 Nov. 2005]

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#### Additional Sources Consulted

**Publications:** *Encyclopedia of the World's Minorities*, 2005.

**Internet Sites, including:** Amnesty International (AI), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), *The Economist* [London], Ethnologue, European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), European Committee on Romani Emancipation (ECRE), European Country of Origin Information Network (ECOI), European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), Freedom House, Human Rights Watch (HRW), International Helsinki Federation (IHF), Minority Electronic Resources, Minorities Rights Group, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), World News Connection (WNC).

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